

HEPATITIS

Hepatitis includes several viral diseases that affect primarily the liver. Although they cause similar acute disease symptoms, they differ in viral agent, the way the diseases are transmitted to people and in the methods of disease prevention.

HEPATITIS A

Hepatitis A is a liver disease that causes jaundice, fatigue, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, nausea and diarrhea. Onset of these symptoms usually occur after 15 - 45 days.

Source

The virus is found in the feces of infected persons. It is spread from person to person by ingesting something that has been contaminated with feces of infected persons. In the U.S., it is most commonly spread among household members and sex contacts of persons with hepatitis A. Another common source of infection are daycare centers. The disease also can be acquired by ingesting contaminated food or water. Contaminated water and food are of greatest concern in countries that have poor sanitary conditions and where good personal hygiene is not practiced. **Casual contact as in the usual office, factory or school setting, does not spread the virus.**

Who is at risk?

- Household contacts and sex partners of infected persons.
- Travelers to countries where hepatitis A is common and where clean water and proper sewage disposal are not available.
- Children and employees in child care centers during outbreaks.

- Residents and staff of institutions for developmentally disabled persons when a resident or an employee has hepatitis A.

Prevention

- Good personal hygiene and proper sanitation (food and water).
- Modifying high risk behaviors.
- Immunoglobulin given pre- and post-exposure.
- Hepatitis A vaccine for high risk groups:
 - Persons who work in or travel to areas where hepatitis A is common.
 - Children in communities with high rates of hepatitis A, such as Alaska Native villages, American Indian reservations.
 - Persons with chronic liver disease.
 - Persons who work with HAV-infected animals or work with HAV in a research setting (hepatitis A vaccine is not generally recommended for health care workers).

HEPATITIS B

Hepatitis B is a liver disease that causes jaundice, fatigue, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting. Onset of these symptoms usually occur after 45 - 180 days.

Source?

The virus is found in the blood and other body fluids of infected person. Approximately 30% - 90% of young children and 2%-10% of adults who are infected develop chronic infections, often without symptoms. Chronically infected persons are at increased risk of developing liver disease including cirrhosis and liver cancer. The major source of transmission in the U.S. is through infected sexual partners. Another important source of transmission is intravenous injection of street drugs.

Hepatitis B can be spread from contaminated needles and other percutaneous injuries with sharp contaminated objects. The disease also can be transmitted from an infected pregnant woman to her unborn child.

Who is at risk?

- Household contacts and sex partners of chronically infected persons.
- Healthcare and public safety personnel who are exposed to blood in the workplace.
- Sexually active homosexual and bisexual men.
- Recipients of clotting-factor concentrates.
- Injecting drug users.

Prevention

- Safety precautions when in contact with blood and other body fluids.
- Modifying high risk behaviors.
- Immunoglobulin given pre- and post-exposure.
- Hepatitis B vaccine for high risk groups (see tables A and B in chapter 36 of NPS 50).

Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is a liver disease that causes jaundice, fatigue, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting. Onset of these symptoms usually occur after 6 - 9 weeks.

Source?

This virus, like Hepatitis B virus, is found in the blood and other body fluids of infected persons. Almost all persons infected with hepatitis C develop chronic infections, usually without symptoms. They are at increased risk of developing liver disease including cirrhosis and liver cancer. Unlike either hepatitis A or B, no protective antibody response occurs with hepatitis C. Therefore there are no vaccines or immunoglobulins for this disease.

Hepatitis C is transmitted through blood transfusion and transplantation of organs from infected donors. Another important source of infection is injecting drugs with contaminated needles. The disease is spread through hemodialysis and contaminated needles and other percutaneous injuries with sharp contaminated objects. It also can be transmitted through sexual and household contact, having multiple sexual partners and from mother to infant.

Who is at risk?

- Household contacts and sex partners of chronically infected persons.
- Healthcare and public safety personnel who are exposed to blood in the workplace.
- Sexually active homosexual and bisexual men.
- Recipients of blood transfusions.
- Hemodialysis patients.
- Injecting drug users.

Prevention

- Screening blood, organ and tissue donors.
- Modifying high risk behaviors.
- Safety precautions when in contact with blood and other body fluids.

REFERENCES

Health Information, National Center for Infectious Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Department of Health and Human Services

HEPATITIS



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Public Health Program
1849 "C" St., NW (Room 7427)
Washington, D.C. 20240
202-565-1120
Fax 202-565-1115

January, 1998

If you have any questions, please contact your Regional Public Health Consultant or park sanitarian, or call WASO Public Health for more information at **202-565-1120** or see our NPS Public Health web page at **www.nps.gov/public_health/**.

